

The Most Beautiful Song

Alberto Campo Baeza

There is a beautiful Max Bollinger story about a certain king who hears in a dream the marvelous song of some unknown bird. Determined to possess this mysterious creature he vehemently orders his royal birdcatcher to trap it for him. Simulating a variety of trills with his flute, the birdcatcher manages to lure the most melodious birds in the kingdom. But, alas, none can produce the song heard in the royal dream. On the last day he is given to find the elusive animal, the birdcatcher takes his flute in utter despair and plays a tune of his own, and behold! the king recognizes it as the song heard in his sleep. The story ends happily with a grand feast in celebration of the discovery that is crowned with the release of all the birds and of the flute-playing birdcatcher.

A similar discovery, a discovery that is steadily gaining recognition, is one that we wish to celebrate with this publication. A publication that demonstrates how in a world that is riddled with noise and is paradoxically mute, creatively speaking, a group of young Spanish architects are playing a very engaging song, their own song, the most beautiful song. A song which is passionately interpreted every day through their architectures, which we here would like to give mention.

Still, more than just a song, we should really be speaking of songs. Because of the diversity of their approaches, there is no easy label capable of accommodating all of these architectures. Yet a common thread that runs through all of their projects is a solid sense of quality. Their architecture, far from aprioristic formalism, is one always composed of strong formal images.

If the convenient “isms” used today could be considered “orthodoxies”, then their very liberal interpretations, their reluctance to comply with established molds, their critical spirit — in short, their Heterodoxy — could be considered a constant in their architecture. And incidentally, heterodoxy has long been a prevalent characteristic throughout the history of Spanish architecture.

If we can ascribe to all of these architects the qualities of profound thought and cultural richness, then we should also include a certain introversion with respect to participation

in international architectural debate. Considered by many to be primarily a form of advertisement, this participation, on the contrary, could be enormously enriching were it to be realized. It is precisely this spirit of dissemination and transmission that is at the heart of this publication.

For if every work of creativity is a work of communication, then architecture by all means should be, has been, and always will be one to the utmost degree. Yet for there to exist a basis for this communication, to establish any kind of dialogue, and to arrive at any conclusion, it is necessary — as is the intention of this work — to ask a thousand and one questions. The recent issue of the prestigious London-based magazine *International Architect* dedicated to Madrid architecture, as well as the one by *Werk, Bauen + Wohnen* of Zurich, worked along these lines, and the answers have started to arrive. Like wise, there is an upcoming monograph being dedicated to Spanish Architecture by the widely circulated Japanese journal, *Process Architecture*.

Contact with the most prestigious names in the world of architecture in the past few years has contributed greatly towards enhancing this dialogue. The paths traced through Madrid, Barcelona, and Sevilla by Meier, Eisenman, Botta, Siza, Silvestri, De Feo, Gandelon, Abraham, Ambasz, Ando, etc., have left deep tracks.

Playing another key role in the blossoming of these splendid architectures and of their young authors, has been their working relationships with their respective schools of architecture. The incorporation of forums for architectural discussion in and around these centers of learning has been a very logical development: most of those featured here are educators in these centers and from there kindle the “sacred fires”.

Yet also included in these pages, it should be stressed, are those who choose to remain detached from these schools and nonetheless continue to produce architecture of supreme quality.

The collaboration of Spanish architectural magazines, occasionally focused on too limited a group, has also at times been very influential in establishing the career of these architects. The obvious seductive power of the printed world

and picture, however, should be kept separate from group interests and at the service of Architecture and Society.

Implied in the work of those included here, is an acknowledgment of the teachings and mastery of the preceding generation of masters (Oiza, Sota, Carvajal, Cano Lasso, Corrales and Molezun, Alba and Moneo) to whom they owe a great debt. Towards these, the newer generation maintains a kind of admiration that is far from succumbing to mere copying or mimicry. Furthermore, it is one that continues to grow before the unfading youth that most of these masters still command.

The so-called “eternal youth” is a phrase applicable to all these young Spanish architects who have, more or less, only recently acquired their degrees and in whom breathes an air of continual “rebeginning”. If earlier we spoke of there not being any one label representative of all their work, neither is there one (although some are occasionally applied for the sake of simplicity) to describe the individual work of each of these architects. Each and every one is soundly heterodoxical.

If at the outset of this commentary we were saying with the help of Max Bollinger that these authors were playing the most beautiful song, we should now like to conclude by enlisting the aid of Truman Capote and his Grass Harp:

«Below the hill grows a field of high Indian grass that changes colour with the seasons: go to see it in the autumn, late September, when it has gone red as sunset, when scarlet shadows like firelight breeze over it and the autumn winds strum on its dry leaves sighing human music, a harp of voices.

...that it was a grass harp, gathering, telling, a harp of voices remembering a story. We listened».

These architects know (as so few do) how to listen to the sound of the grass harp.

They know, without speaking of “pertenence” how to produce an architecture that is rooted in its own culture.

They know, without speaking of regionalism, how to firmly plant an architecture in its own surroundings.

They know, without slipping into plagiarisms, how to convey what is current, because often times they are and will be the ones to set the pace.

They know that architecture is something more than just distinguishing between “modern” and “postmodern”.

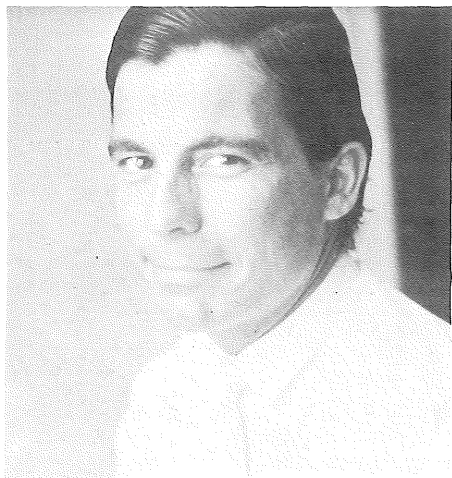
And if they know how to listen to the grass harp — rustling breezes of the wind over ripe fields — and know how to play their own, beautiful song — sonorous vibrations of the wind across their flutes — they are, with their architecture, a devastating hurricane, an unstoppable avalanche. Time will tell us the rest.

Alberto Campo Baeza

*School in San Sebastián de los Reyes
Madrid, 1983*

*Preschool in San Sebastián de los Reyes
Madrid, 1984*

46



Alberto Campo Baeza

1946. Born in Valladolid.

1971. Graduated ETSAM. Madrid.

1982. Doctoral Thesis.

1976. Profesor of Design ETSAM.

1971. First Prize.

Festival Palace. Santander.

1973. First Prize.

Parador Nacional in Cuenca.

1977. First Prize.

Town Hall. Fene.

1978. First Prize.

Cathedral Plaza. Almería.

1979. First Prize.

MEC Schools Competition.

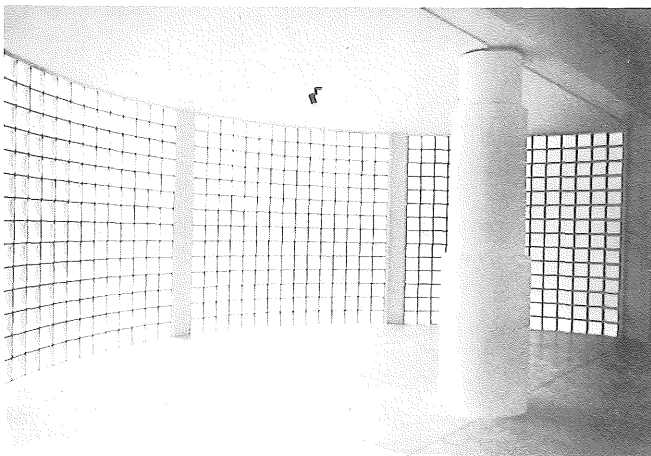
1982. First Prize.

Gymnasium ETSAM.

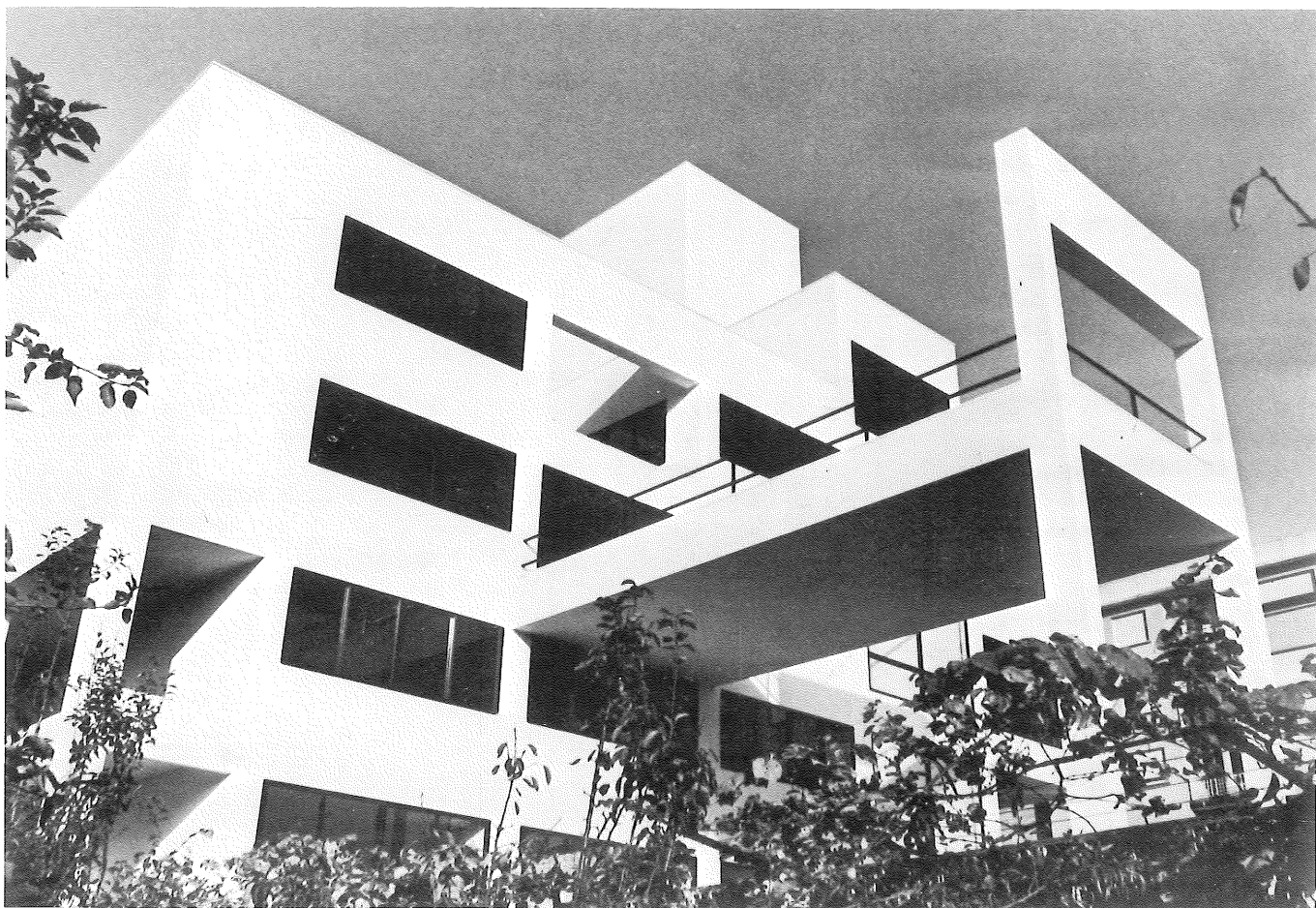
1977. A+U Correspondent
in Madrid.

1985. Biennale de Paris.

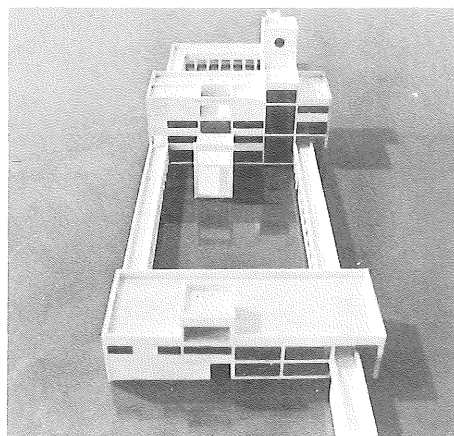
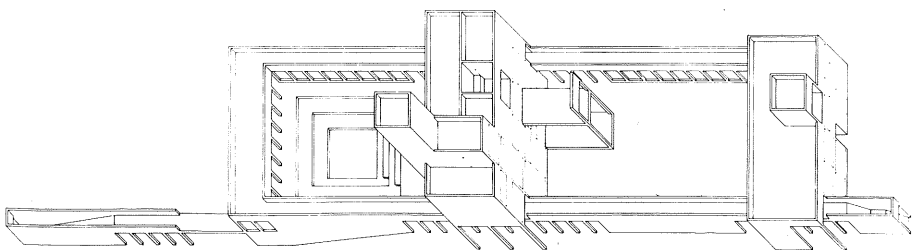
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Fene Town Hall
1977-80



47



*Nursery in Aspe
Alicante, 1976-84*

with Javier Esteban Martín

*Nursery in Crevillente
Alicante, 1976-85*

with Javier Esteban Martín

